



**No Practice?
No Problem!**

Reassessing our priorities as
instrumental teachers.



DYNAMITE STRINGS

'BIG tunes for beginners'

Ideal for groups & individuals
Unique coloured notation
AMAZING backing tracks!!

VIOLIN BOOK 1
Georgina Leach

YouTube Listen On Spotify

UK Flag

“If I set the right conditions in my lessons and the wider school,
practice becomes not only
irresistible,
but inevitable!”



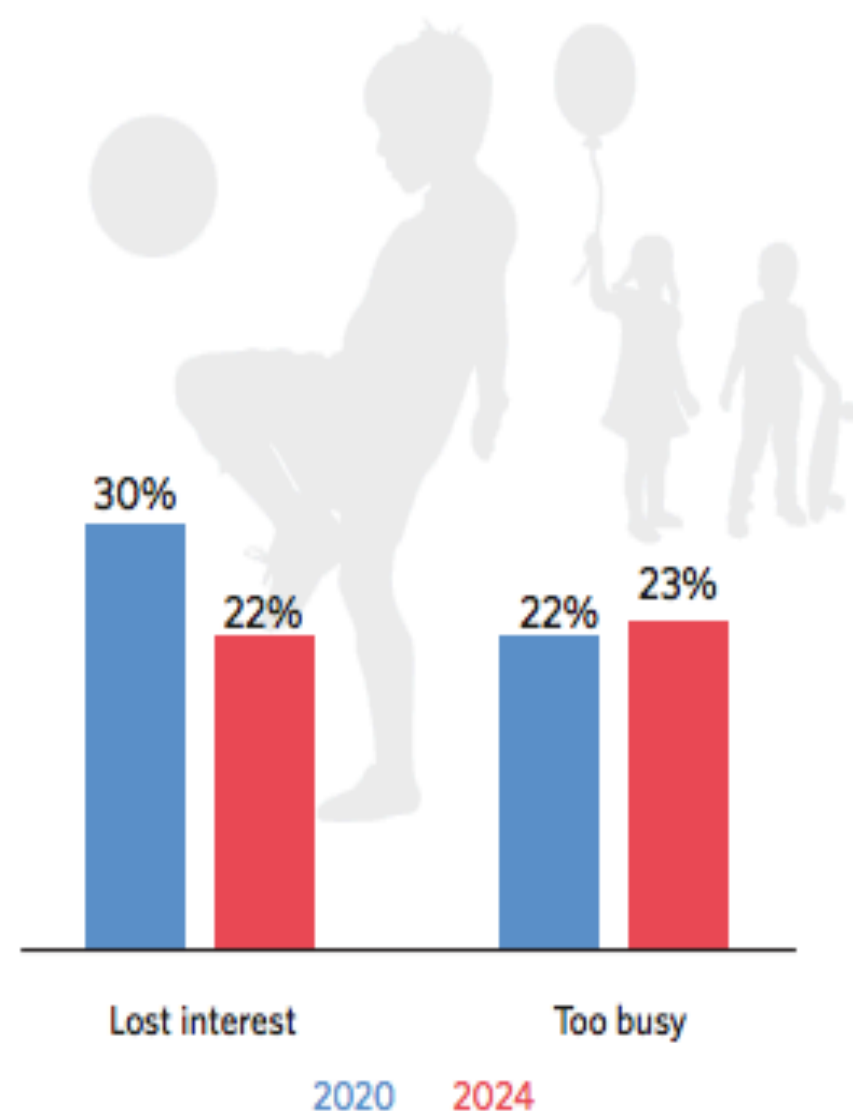
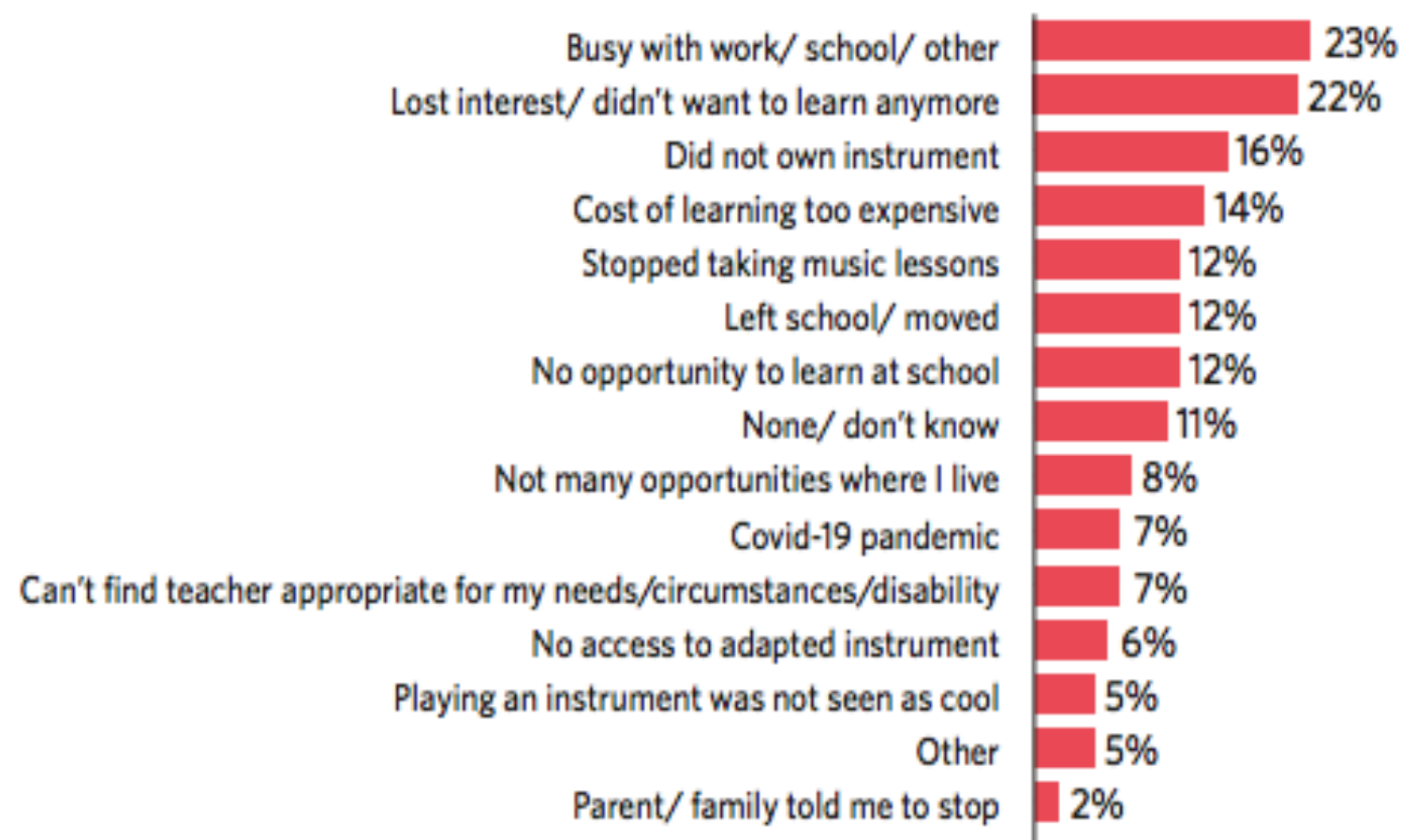
Despite having unprecedented numbers of students starting instrumental lessons, the fewest ever are reaching ‘Foundation Level’ (Grades 1 – 3).

Faultley and Whittaker (2016). *Key Data on Music Educations Hubs*

Key findings from ABRSM 'Making Music' Report 2025:

- **Significant drops** in formal instrumental lessons at around 11 and 15 years old
- **Fun vs. Assessment:** 45% of young musicians engage with music for recreation, 27% to gain formal qualifications
- **Mental Health as the Core Driver:** 84% of young people and 87% of music teachers say playing an instrument is vital for mental health and emotional well-being
- **Digital Self-Learning:** Young people are increasingly turning to apps, YouTube, and digital tools to learn and compose on their own terms outside formal lessons.
- **Decline in Music GCSE uptake**

Figure 61: Reasons for children stopping playing an instrument



‘In 2017, only 3.5% of entrants to UK music conservatoires were from a highly deprived background (a drop of 1.7% from the previous year)’

ISM et al. (2019). *Music Education: State of the Nation*

CLASSICAL TRAINING:

- Master/apprentice model of learning
- Study a set canon of music.
- Formal 'schools' of technique
- Learning technical elements outside repertoire e.g. scales and studies
- Assimilated via staff notation
- Understanding of music theory and other conventions is expected

INFORMAL TRAINING/MORE LOOSELY DEFINED GENRES

- Peer to peer or collaborative learning
- Freedom of choice in repertoire guided by personal interests
- Greater emphasis on self-expression e.g. improvisation and song-writing
- More flexible approach to technique
- More likely to be assimilated by ear/TAB/online tutorial
- Knowledge of music theory is not assumed



Strings at All Saints Catholic College, Ladbroke Grove

- 25 piece string ensemble
- Excellent lesson attendance (96.7%!)
- Very high rates of student retention
- Represent a cross section of whole-school demographic
- Mixed ability, but 50% students playing at Grade 3 +



Strings at All Saints Catholic College, Ladbroke Grove

- Show initiative
- Sense of community
- String players are respected in the school
- 75% Music GCSE

MOTIVATION and SELF ESTEEM

“If students have a profound desire to reach a certain goal and a strong belief that they have the ability to get there, they will go far”



ATTENDANCE and ATTENTION

'Attention is the currency of learning'

Peps Macrae, The Motivated Classroom

We need to convince students to spend their attention on our content.





Making Lessons a

FABULOUSLY
POSITIVE EXPERIENCE

FIVE RULES

- Welcome students warmly
- Take them as they came – no nagging!
- Satisfying musical experience
- Engage with their personal musical interests
- Shower them with encouragement and praise

Students Minimum Commitment:

1. Reliably attend their lessons every week
2. Reliably attend String Ensemble every week
3. Give their full focus

A WARM WELCOME

Establish friendly yet professional rapport

- Mutual respect
- Builds trust
- Increases resilience

TAKE THEM AS THEY COME

No nagging about practice.

Two of the major predictors of success in young musicians are:

- High levels of parental engagement
- Regular practice

Barriers to learning faced by disadvantaged children include:

- Lack of parental support
- Lack of access to enhanced learning opportunities

Schools are trying to level the playing field by:

- Timetabling homework into the school day
- Making homework optional
- No homework

I absolutely expect all my students to develop good practice habits and make great progress, but I also have patience.

I recognise it may take some young people longer to buy into the process of training to be a musician.

Introducing Practice

- Invite rather than demand
- Use a variety of words e.g. 'play/perform/have a look at'
- Consider what counts as practice?
- Respond enthusiastically to any evidence of practice!

HAVE A FUN SATISFYING MUSICAL EXPERIENCE

- 'Secure success' in the first task
- Make students sound AMAZING
- Pitching material
- Remove as many barriers as possible
- Small and large projects
- Practice practising

26. Twinkle Twinkle Little Star Traditional

| **A A E E** | **1 1 E** | **3 3 2 2** | **1 1 A** |

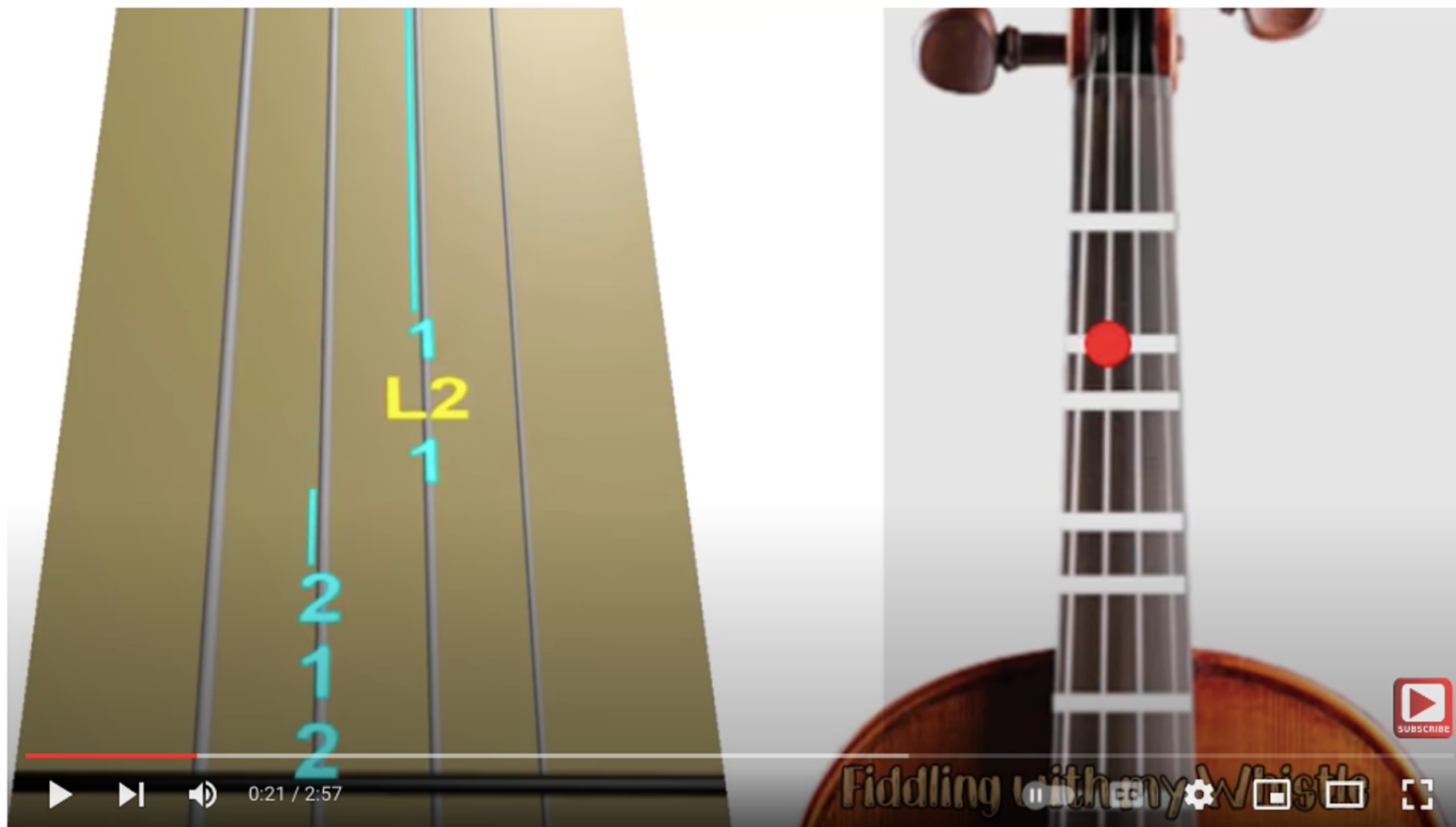
| **E E 3 3** | **2 2 1** | **E E 3 3** | **2 2 1** |

| **A A E E** | **1 1 E** | **3 3 2 2** | **1 1 A** |



ENGAGE WITH THEIR PERSONAL MUSICAL INTERESTS

- What do they specifically like about playing music and the violin
- Foster a collaborative environment
- Personalised repertoire
- Technology



Fiddling with my Whistle - 'guitar hero' style tab

SHOWER STUDENTS WITH ENCOURAGEMENT AND PRAISE

‘Sir kind of tries to insult you into being good, he’s really harsh and you know, piano is something I do for enjoyment, it’s supposed to be a hobby’

Khadija, Y9

SHOWER STUDENTS WITH ENCOURAGEMENT AND PRAISE

- Extent to which we 'inflict' our own training on our students
 - Help student develop positive inner voice
 - Praise effort if you can't praise the result
 - Backchannel positive feedback
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- Build resilience – get comfortable with mistakes
 - Rewards – INTRINSIC rather than EXTRINSIC

WHOLE SCHOOL MUSICAL CULTURE

- Consistent support from SLT
- Variety of bands/ensembles/choirs
- Active recruitment
- School trips to see concerts/musicals
- Regular well-attended performance opportunities
- Special treatment because you're 'IN THE BAND'
- Reward trip/privileges

TO CONCLUDE:

- Prioritise attendance and attention
- Be patient with your students while they buy into the process of becoming a musician
- Consider being more open in your criteria for what constitutes 'practice'
- Strive for a positive, collaborative lesson environment that is tailored to students' unique preferences and personality